

January 17, 2023

To the Working Group on the Status of Libraries in Vermont,

As a visually impaired Vermonter, many of the services most readers take for granted are not accessible to me. Shelves of books are interesting and reminiscent of times long gone when I could check out a book and read it from cover to cover. However, all is not lost. As a matter of fact, I probably read more books now than I did when I had 20/20 vision.

Through Vermont's ABLE library, I am able (We changed the name three years ago to represent Audio, Braille, Large-print, and Electronic) to participate in four book clubs and keep up on numerous topics of interest. The ABLE library with its limited staff provide talking and large-print books to print disable Vermonters statewide. On the other hand, the ABLE library should not be the sole source of accessible materials to persons with disabilities. All 185 local libraries need to step up and make sure their buildings and programs are available to all. For example, are their computers accessible to persons with physical, visual, or cognitive disabilities? Probably "yes" since the latest Microsoft Windows operating system includes numerous accessibility features that I am sure most library staff are not aware of.

In summary, with a few exceptions Vermont libraries are willing and able to physically meet their patrons needs. However, we all need to step up and ensure training is provided to library staff to recognize when a patron may be having difficulties accessing books and other programs available to their communities. Let's make it possible that all are 'able' to read.

Full disclosure: I am the current chair of the ABLE Advisory Committee and the Vermont Board of Libraries.

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